

Robert P. Fitzgerald House
1119 North Marshall Street
Milwaukee
Milwaukee County
Wisconsin

HABS No. WIS-266

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. WIS-266

ROBERT P. FITZGERALD HOUSE

Location: 1119 North Marshall Street (west side of North Marshall Street between East State Street and East Juneau Avenue), Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

Present Owner and Occupant: College Women's Club (Milwaukee Branch, American Association of University Women)

Present Use: Clubhouse

Statement of Significance: Edward Townsend Mix, a prominent local architect, drew the plans for this Italian Villa, built in 1874 for Milwaukee shipping pioneer, Captain Robert P. Fitzgerald. Since the 1960s, it has been the clubhouse of the Milwaukee Branch of the American Association of University Women, for whom it has been remodelled and enlarged in recent years.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1874. A Sentinel article of December 31, 1874, lists Fitzgerald's home among the buildings erected in Milwaukee that year and gives the cost as \$20,000.
2. Architect: Edward Townsend Mix, Milwaukee. The Sentinel story just cited identifies Mix as the architect.

Mix (1831-1890) was born and raised in New Haven, Connecticut and was apprenticed for six years to Richard Upjohn, a New York architect who was a leading proponent of Gothic Revival architecture. He came to Milwaukee in 1856 after a period of practice in Chicago in association with William W. Boyington, architect of Chicago's famous Water Tower. During the course of his practice in Milwaukee, Mix produced a wide variety of buildings, ranging from flamboyant Victorian designs to meticulously correct Gothic Revival forms. He was particularly noted for his fine ecclesiastical architecture. His Milwaukee churches include All Saints Episcopal Church (WIS-265), Immanuel Presbyterian Church (WIS-263), and St. Paul's Episcopal Church (WIS-271). Another example of his domestic architecture is the Jason Downer House (WIS-260).

3. Original and subsequent owners: In July 1872, Robert Patrick Fitzgerald purchased, for the sum of \$8,500, the lots on Marshall Street on which his spacious residence was later erected. In 1897 he sold the house to Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Clyde Fuller, from whom Mr. and Mrs. George Benjamin Miller, the Fullers' daughter and son-in-law, bought it in 1921. Twenty-five years later Miller's widow sold it to Ella Spencer (E. H. Spencer Co.), and at that time the residence was converted into a rooming house-apartment building. It was still serving as such when the present owners acquired it about 1963.
4. Builders and suppliers: Unknown
5. Original plans: None known
6. Alterations and additions: In an interview with the Journal's Peggy Daum in 1963, Mrs. George B. Miller, who had lived in the Fitzgerald house from 1897 until her marriage in 1911 and from 1921 through 1945, recalled that it had comprised two living rooms, library, dining room, and kitchen on the first floor and nine bedrooms (including three maids' rooms) on the second. The plan was of the central hall type having parlors in the northeast and southeast corners flanking the broad stairhall, dining room west of the north parlor, and library west of the south parlor, with sliding doors separating these rooms. There is no evidence that the house had been altered in any important way during Capt. Fitzgerald's time, and Mrs. Miller has stated, in a recent letter to the recorder, that few changes were made during her parents' and her ownership. She remembers that at early dates electricity was installed, and a small two-story addition containing a bedroom on the second floor and an open porch below was built near the southwest corner of the house (the porch was later enclosed). She states, further, that the single bath at the head of the stairs, second floor, was converted into two bathrooms and that another bath was added at the front (east end) of the house on the same level.

The earliest building permit on file at the General Office, Building Inspection, dates from January 9, 1946, when Mrs. Miller had sold her home and it was about to be transformed into an apartment building. The permit, No. 560, lists "existing occupancies" as five rooms and two baths on the first story, nine rooms and three baths on the second and describes "proposed occupancies" as three two-room apartments and two one-room units, all

with baths, on the first level and two two-room apartments, three single-room units, three sleeping rooms, and five baths on the second floor. Remodelling was to cost \$2,500; the contractor was Bernhard Wallner; and the work was finished by June, 1946. A related permit, No. 3609, February 21, 1946, records construction of a fire escape by the Banner Ornamental Iron Works. Six years later furnace and fuel rooms were enclosed to conform with the Wisconsin State Building Code, as is documented by Permit No. 20363A, November 6, 1952, and other records. Contractor for this work was Dan Retzer.

According to Peggy Daum's account in the Journal for October 23, 1963, and Frederick J. Schweitzer's drawings of first and second floor plans as they were in the fall of 1964 (sheet No. 11 of the remodelling plans) the building remained relatively unchanged until the mid-1960s. Permits Nos. 92643, 93304, 94389, 94446, 101302, 104971, 125735, and 155195, dating from November 2, 1964 through October 26, 1966, all relate to the alterations and construction of an addition for the present owners. F. J. Schweitzer, then of Schweitzer-Slater Associates, Milwaukee, was the architect; the carpenter-contractor was Charles Wunder; Masonry Inc. handled the mason work; and the ornamental plaster work was executed by the Decorative Plaster Supply Co. The architect's rendering of original fabric and proposed addition, seen from the east, appeared in the Journal for April 30, 1964, and has since been reproduced on the club's notes, cards, and other items. His specifications (eleven pages) and plans (eighteen sheets), dated August and September 1964, together with correspondence on the project and two shop drawings, all are preserved on microfilm at the City Records Center, B-1 Municipal Building. In sum, the \$175,000 project involved:

- a. Demolition of the rear (west) section of the original building--that portion comprising kitchen, servants' rooms, and the two-story addition mentioned above--and the brick coach house standing just southwest of the house and erection of a single-story L-shaped brick and block addition adjoining the original fabric on the west and southwest. Face brick and exterior and interior trim salvaged from razed and remodelled areas of the original house were used in this wing, which

contains a large dining hall-meeting room with a stage at the north end, a lounge, the kitchen, and a lobby.

- b. Construction of a walled courtyard adjoining house and new wing on the southeast corner of the lot.
- c. On the exterior of the original fabric: A new foundation, steps, and floor were constructed for the east porch, in addition to the installation of new iron railings; in the east facade a new ornamental grill was installed in the pediment; the entire exterior was renovated and redecorated, with brick and stone painted pale gold, and the wooden and iron trim painted white and black.
- d. Interior, original fabric: The central staircase joining main and second stories was removed and a new stairway, connecting basement, first, and second floors was created in the southeast corner of the building. The balusters, railing, and newel of the original staircase were used here. The basement was remodelled to include, on the south side, a men's restroom, lobby, and coat room. On the main floor, partitions on the south side were removed to create the present spacious lounge. (Marble fireplaces at north and south ends of this room came from the Girls' Club, 1035 North Van Buren Street, which was demolished in 1963. Two items now here--the rosewood sofa and the marble bust Laura--had been in the house in the Fullers' day and were donated to the club by Mrs. Miller.) The northeast corner room on this level became the club's office. Restroom and powder room are west of the office; and west of these rooms, in what was the dining room, is the club's board room, with the original fireplace remaining (though altered). On the second story, too, partitions were removed and new ones installed to create the present facilities. By and large, on first and second stories, the original ceiling heights were retained; much of the original woodwork and plaster trim survives and was either left in place or used in remodelling and new construction. The entire interior has been redecorated.
- e. Generally, installation of new heating and air-conditioning system; new plumbing throughout; new wiring, electrical work throughout.

Notes in the files of the General Office, Building Inspection, record that the addition had been finished and approved by July 1966. Work on the original fabric continued for several months, and then, on May 6, 1967, the Fitzgerald house was formally dedicated as the College Women's Club.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

1. The original owner Robert Patrick Fitzgerald was born in Ireland on May 10, 1825, came to North America as a boy and, at the age of nineteen, was commanding a schooner in the Lake Huron trade. By the 1850s he had settled in Milwaukee. During the next decade, he established what was to become a highly successful vessel brokerage and marine insurance business. He joined in partnership with Captain John B. Merrill, with whom he was associated until Merrill's retirement in 1899. He is reported to have had interests in the Milwaukee Drydock Co. for several years and to have been associated during the 1870s and 1880s with P. D. Armour and W. Egan in the building and acquisition of various schooners and steamers. As one of the founders of Milwaukee's Board of Trade (later Chamber of Commerce), he served as an officer of the Northwestern Ship Owners' Association and a director of the Seaman's Friends Society and Sailors' Home as well. After selling the house on Marshall Street to the Oliver C. Fullers in 1897, Captain and Mrs. Fitzgerald resided briefly in Oconomowoc and then moved to a residence on Grand (Wisconsin) Avenue, where Fitzgerald died on January 9, 1900. Both the house's second owner and the third, George B. Miller, were also prominent businessmen, Fuller having been an officer of the combined First National and Wisconsin National Bank and his son-in-law, a member of a pioneer Milwaukee family, having been an insurance executive and, in later years, president of the Monarch Manufacturing Co.
2. Milwaukee's chapter of the American Association of University Women was organized seventy-six years ago. In 1919 the women acquired their first clubhouse, a building on East Wells Street. Three years later they purchased the colorful Cudahy residence at 1330 North Prospect Avenue, which served them until the early 1960s, when they sold it to the Layton School of Art. (The mansion has since been demolished.) Then, in 1963, the former Fitzgerald house on North Marshall Street became their property. Initially they favored razing

the aging structure and erecting a new clubhouse on the site, but then decided to rejuvenate and enlarge the building, commencing the costly three-year project described above in 1964.

3. The Fitzgerald house was named a Milwaukee Landmark in September 1968.
4. In July 1970, the clubhouse received an award for restoration and rehabilitation in the Environmental Arts Competition of the Southeast Section, Wisconsin Chapter, American Institute of Architects.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: Mrs. Miller has informed the recorder that she has "many pictures of that house at all stages of my living there." Two of them--a very old view of the exterior, taken before the first story of the porch near the southwest corner of the building was enclosed, and a view of the dining room (now board room) fireplace taken in the early twentieth century which accompanied the Journal story of October 23, 1963. A photo of the house and nearby coach house, seen from the southeast, appeared in the Journal for March 20, 1966.

2. Bibliography:

- a. Primary and unpublished sources:

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Building permits and other records, 1946-66, General Office, Building Inspection, 1010 Municipal Building.

Inspection of fabric August 12 and 26 and September 7 and 25, 1970.

Interview with Frederick J. Schweitzer, Architect, September 8, 1970.

Interviews with Mrs. Martha M. Holm and Mrs. George O. Toepfer, College Women's Club, August 26, 1970.

Interviews with Walter DeSwarte of the Frederick J. Schweitzer architectural firm, September 8 and 25, 1970.

Miller, Mrs. George B., letter to recorder of September 10, 1970, in recorder's files.

Milwaukee Sentinel Index, Local History Room, Milwaukee Public Library.

"Progress Report of Building Committee 1963-67," a notebook of clippings, photographs, and documents compiled by club members Mrs. George O. Toepfer and Mrs. Martha M. Holm, is particularly valuable.

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Schweitzer, Frederick J., plans and specifications for remodelling and addition, dated August 1 and September 9, 1964, microfilms on file at City Records Center, B-1 Municipal Building.

b. Secondary and published sources:

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Pagel, Mary Ellen, "Historic Milwaukee Buildings," Historical Messenger of the Milwaukee County Historical Society, XXIV, December 1968, 100, 101.

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Withey, Henry F. and Withey, Elsie R. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased), Los Angeles, 1956, 423-24.

Prepared by Mary Ellen Wieczykowski
1111 North Astor Street
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September 25, 1970

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Although altered in the 1940s and significantly modified in the 1960s, this landmark remains a good, late example of the Italian villa style. Characteristic of that style are the elaborate cornice brackets, the tall, arched windows with ornamental keystones, a hipped-roof of low pitch and the decorative

wooden porch. Portions of the rich wood and plaster trim and several fireplaces survive in the remodelled interior, and vestiges of the original central hall of the first and second stories also remain. The front elevation is symmetrical with a pedimented pavilion and single-story entrance porch composing the central bay of the facade.

2. Condition of fabric: Excellent

B. Description of Exterior (original fabric only, unless otherwise stated):

1. Over-all dimensions: The original section of the Fitzgerald house is approximately square, measuring 44 feet wide (north-south) (three bays) by 45 feet deep. The addition is 88 feet 4 inches wide (north-south) by 44 feet 9 inches where it intersects the original fabric and 61 feet deep on the south, where it projects beyond the nineteenth century building. The former residence is two stories in height, plus basement and attic; the addition is a single-story structure.
2. Foundations: Limestone
3. Wall construction: Above the limestone basement walls, the walls are Milwaukee pressed brick trimmed with brick, stone, wood, and iron. All exterior walls and stone and brick trim are now painted pale gold; wood and iron trim are painted white and black.
4. Porch: The ornamental wooden entrance porch on the east elevation has new brick stairways with Lannon stone treads at north and south and a new concrete slab floor with Lannon stone edge. Paired Tuscan columns of wood on pedestals stand at the northeast and southeast corners of the porch and support the flat roof. The wooden entablature is adorned with triglyphs, dentils, and carved foliage. There are cast-iron railings (not original) along the front of the porch and the two stairways. The porch has been painted white; the railings are black.
5. Chimneys: There are three painted Milwaukee pressed brick chimneys with corbeled caps.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main (east) entrance is set in a basket-handle arch, with a round brick surround. The wooden panelled, double doors have decorative windows in the upper panels, as do the two irregularly shaped lights of the arched tympanum. On the second story, west elevation, is a wooden panelled door opening onto the roof of the addition. A small wooden double door in the north elevation gives access to the basement.
- b. Windows: The basement windows are arched wood-frame units. Almost all windows on the first and second stories are basket-handle or round arched, wood-framed, double-hung units with one-over-one lights. These have a raised brick surround crowned by decorative keystones as well as a stone sill. Windows on the east facade are symmetrically arranged, with double windows flanking the entrance porch on the first floor and three single windows on the second level. There are small rectangular openings in the attic frieze, those on the facade having iron grilles, and a larger, wood-framed, iron grille (grille not original) in the pediment on the facade.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape and covering: The truncated, hipped roof has an intersecting gable at the pedimented pavilion on the east. It is clad with standing seam metal.
- b. Framing: Timber
- c. Cornice and eaves: Molded wood; wooden roof brackets, the larger of them with pendants.

8. Stairways: Two porch stairways; steel fire escape on west elevation.

C. Description of Interior (original fabric only):

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: North of the east-west corridor are storage, heating, and equipment rooms; to the south are the stairhall, men's restroom, and coat room; and at the west end of the corridor is the men's lobby.

- b. First floor: As one enters the clubhouse on the east, there are a shallow vestibule, a reception hall, and coat room. Stairhall and lounge are on the south; general office, powder room, restroom, and board room are on the north.
 - c. Second floor: Contains a central corridor-gallery space, with powder room, rest room, bathroom, courtesy room, storage space, and the caretaker's quarters on the north and the stairhall and craft room on the south.
2. Stairways: Joining all levels of the clubhouse, the new main stairway is in the southeast corner of the building. On the second floor a short flight of steps (three risers) leads from the corridor-gallery to the exit at the west end of this area. The attic stairway is a wooden pull-down ladder located in the ceiling of the second floor craft room.
3. Flooring: The basement is concrete, with soft tile in the corridor, coat room, and men's lobby, ceramic tile in the men's restroom. On the first floor, soft tile is in the vestibule, reception hall, and coat room, with ceramic tile in the restroom, and carpeting elsewhere. On the second floor, there is linoleum in the gallery, craft room, and storage areas, and soft tile in the powder room, with ceramic tile in the rest room and bathroom, and carpeting in the courtesy room. The main stairway is carpeted; second floor exit stairs are wooden.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are plaster throughout except in basement utility rooms where limestone basement walls have been left exposed. Molded wooden baseboards, cornices, and chair rails may be found in many rooms of the club, and much of this woodwork is original, though not always in its original location. Ceilings are plaster except in the reception hall, general office, gallery, and craft room where acoustical tile has been used.
5. Doorways and doors: In the basement, there are rectangular wooden, flush doors with wooden frames. Most first and second story doors are rectangular, wooden doors with two tiers of two molded panels and with richly molded wooden frames. The exceptions are the arched, wood-framed, wooden double door of six panels (three tiers of molded panels) between the general office and the reception hall and the arched, wood-framed, wooden double-door of two panels, the upper panels containing windows of ornamental glass, between the vestibule and the reception hall.

6. Fireplaces: Those in the first floor lounge (from the nineteenth century but not original to this building) and in the second floor courtesy room are white marble and have arched openings surmounted by carved cartouches and covered with decorative metal covers. The board room fireplace (original but altered) has a rectangular opening with an Italian Coralito marble surround and hearth, wooden moldings, and shelving above with leaded glass doors.
7. Trim: Birch, oak, and pine
8. Hardware: Brass (little, if any, is original)
9. Lighting: Electric
10. Heating: City heat

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Facing east, the clubhouse stands on the west side of North Marshall Street and is bounded on the south and west by a parking lot and on the north by a driveway and a garage.
2. Enclosure: A high brick wall with a wooden gate encloses the new patio near the southeast corner of the lot.
3. Walks and driveway: Two new concrete walks, with short flights of steps and iron handrails, lead from the Marshall Street sidewalk to the stairways on the north and south sides of the entrance porch, and there is a walk between the latter and the patio gate. A driveway along the south wall of the patio joins Marshall Street and the service entry in the addition.
4. Landscaping: Several fine old elm trees remain on the site, and there are three small trees on the north side of the lot, bushes in front of the entrance porch and house proper, shrubbery along the patio walls, plantings in the courtyard, and lawns on the east and northeast sides of the clubhouse.

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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made during the 1970 Milwaukee Project under the sponsorship of the Milwaukee Landmarks Commission of the City of Milwaukee--Richard W. E. Perrin, Chairman--and were donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey. This project was the continuation of a program to record the historic architecture of Milwaukee begun in 1969, under the joint sponsorship of the Milwaukee Landmarks Commission and the Historic American Buildings Survey, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service, Department of the Interior. The project team included architect John Thiel of Milwaukee; architectural historian Mary Ellen Wietczykowski--now Mary Ellen Young--(Milwaukee Landmarks Commission); and photographer Douglas Green. The data was prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress by HABS editors Carolyn Heath, Mary Farrell, Candace Reed, and Philip Hamp.